

# T<sup>3</sup>: Trustee Training Tips

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## THE HIERARCHY OF GOVERNANCE

Many of the questions trustees have start with “can we ...?” and the next question, assuming the answer was not what was desired, usually centers on “what if we change our bylaws?” Sometimes that answer is the solution but other times it is just not an option. When can a library board make decisions to change the “rules” to allow or prohibit certain actions? The answer to that all important question lies in the hierarchy of governance, which simply put, means that no lower body can change a law or regulation imposed by a higher body. It looks like this:

- ↓ The Constitution of the United States
- ↓ Federal Law
- ↓ Federal Regulation
- ↓ The Kentucky Constitution
- ↓ State Law
- ↓ State Regulation
- ↓ Local Ordinance (county or city)
- ↓ Library’s Bylaws
- Library’s Policies
- tradition* (not really, but really)

Just as Congress cannot enact a law that is unconstitutional, every other governmental entity listed above is restricted by the powers of those above it. Federal laws include such library-related issues as copyright, FLS and a plethora of personnel law, Americans With Disabilities Act, the Pro-Children Act of 1994, civil rights, etc. State laws (Kentucky Revised Statutes or KRSs) include labor laws, Open Meetings Act, Open Records Act, laws for special taxing districts including but not limited to library taxing districts, etc. But there are also the library specific laws (KRS 173) and regulations that cover everything from the establishment of libraries to certification of staff to construction of buildings and on and on.

Local ordinances are too varied from community to community to attempt to cover here, but they do exist. One example is the City of Georgetown’s placement of trees and shrubs on public property. The City of Bardstown has ordinances regarding signs and paint colors used in the historic district.

The directional arrows stop with the individual library’s adopted polices, as that is where the official responsibility stops in a governance sense, but tradition is listed because it influences much of what is done. It’s a case of continuing to do something without questioning *why* simply because it’s the way “we’ve always done it.” Sometimes this can be the hardest part of the hierarchy to change, so don’t dismiss it lightly.

## EVALUATION TIPS

Spring is budget time and that usually means director evaluation time as well because it only makes sense to consider your director's job performance at the same time you set his/her salary for the coming fiscal year. Remember: the board has one employee and only one, so the task of formal evaluation is not nearly as onerous as what the director must do. While the board may elect to approve a percentage increase for the personnel category, it should set director's salary independent of all other staff. And documentation for that salary resides in the performance appraisal.

The process starts with the board's decision on how to conduct the evaluation and what tool to use. There are numerous examples, but the best will be one a given board writes to fit its library. Look at the job description, the long-range or strategic plan, the library's mission and goals, and the competencies your board has agreed are essential for your library director. Then construct a scale spanning three to five levels of achievement. Name the points of this scale whatever feels right: Needs Improvement, Satisfactory, Outstanding, etc.

Perhaps what is most important is that it be a *board* evaluation, not a tally or average of five individual scores. To make this happen, each trustee must contribute an opinion and the full board must reach a consensus on each measurement. It is this frank discussion that allows a board to assess adequately their director's performance. While checklists are a temptation because they are easy, they do not provide the in-depth analysis that is really needed. A form that requires thought is far superior, but to remain manageable should be kept to a workable number of categories/questions. And what works for this year may not next—especially

if the library is involved in a major project like construction, for example.

It is also valuable to require the director to do a self-evaluation using the same form. Asking for a completed copy *after* the board has discussed the measurements (so as not to be influenced) but *before* reaching a final decision (so as to be influenced) is a good idea. Trustees may find they have misunderstood *what* their director is doing because they do not know *why* s/he is doing it. The self-evaluation can explain those misconceptions and allow a board to score their employee more accurately and eliminate possible tension during the feedback part of the process.

Feedback is essential. Whether the entire board or the president discusses the board's evaluation with the director is your decision. There are pros and cons for either choice, but it must be done or the whole exercise is useless. What is important is that whoever speaks for the board understands the message to be conveyed and understands that performance appraisals are just as much about compliments as criticisms. Evaluations are an opportunity for both parties to ask, "Is it me? Is it you? Is it this place?" Finding the answers together is your goal. Figuring out what to do next can become next year's measurement of success.

Your local Regional Consultant can provide assistance at a number of levels, from helping you find or construct the best evaluation tool to providing guidance through the step-by-step process to suggesting rewards for exceptional performance. There are many "right" ways to do this task and it should be a high priority of every library board. And when you have finished with your director, evaluate yourself as a board!

## LIBRARY JARGON

One of the first frustrations new trustees encounter is likely to be figuring out what the library director and the more seasoned trustees are talking about. As with all professions, librarianship is wrought with its own special language—language that can be quite confusing to the uninitiated—rife with specialized meanings and acronyms. While the best advice is to simply ask what something means, below is a quick matching game to identify some frequently heard terms spilling from the lips of librarians.

1 Intellectual freedom	a Americans with Disabilities Act
2 CE	b customers
3 WiFi	c older youth
4 ILL	d services offered outside the library
5 CEO	e remove outdated or shabby materials
6 ADA	f children between the ages of 9 and 12
7 Patrons	g continuing education
8 Stacks	h revenue
9 Tweens	i Online card catalog
10 YA	j KY Department for Libraries & Archives
11 Inventory	k library director
12 Income	l book cases
13 LSTA	m checking out library materials
14 Weed	n wireless fidelity
15 Circulation	o controlled growth of materials
16 KDLA	p borrowing items from another library
17 KPLA	q Library Services and Technology Act
18 Outreach	r holdings or collection
19 Collection Development	s right of a person to read what s/he wants
20 OPAC	t Kentucky Public Library Association

## AGREE TO AGREE

Trustees are told to speak with one voice and to vote their convictions even when it goes against the majority. While this may seem to be contradictory at first glance, it is not.

Each board member should feel free to voice his/her opinion during the discussion that precedes each vote. This is the time to speak with passion for your point of view, to try to persuade your fellow trustees to see it your way. A member of the board should never, never vote to go along with the others just to avoid conflict. There are five (usually) members of your board to present five points of view on matters. If a rubber stamp were all that was needed, the boards wouldn't be needed. Speak up and vote what you truly believe is best for the library—regardless of how the others vote.

But once the vote is recorded the time to argue is over. From this point forward be a team player and acknowledge the majority rule. Remember your duty of loyalty and support the decision of the board with good grace.

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## LIBRARY LETTERS

*Dear Marian Librarian,*

*We have a trustee who had to miss four meetings due to very unusual circumstances that are not likely to occur again. We all agree she is a real asset to our board. Can we change our bylaws to make these absences excused ones?*

*-- Troubled Trustee*

Dear Troubled,

There are two issues in your question. First of all, the “rule” about not missing more than three times in any one term year is a Kentucky statute (KRS 173.350; 173.500; 173.735), and no library can make bylaws that conflict with state law. So on that front the answer is “no.” Your question also implies you believe there are excused and unexcused absences and this is not so. One is either there or not there—period. And state law says one must be there at least 75% of the time to remain on the board.

## MATCH GAME ANSWERS

1	s	11	r
2	g	12	h
3	n	13	q
4	p	14	e
5	k	15	m
6	a	16	j
7	b	17	t
8	l	18	d
9	f	19	o
10	c	20	i

*Score one point for each correct answer:*

- 18+ you speak librarian like a pro
- 14-17 you know your way around a library
- 10-13 you know how to check out a book
- 6-9 you know how to read a book
- 0-5 you try to use your “liberry” card in the ATM

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